

Message Text

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SUBJ: INITIAL REACTION TO BUNKER SPEECH

SUMMARY: PANAMANIAN REACTION TO AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S SEATTLE SPEECH HAS BEEN SWIFT AND HIGHLY POSITIVE. PERSON CLOSE TO TOP GOP LEADERS HAS TOLD US IT WILL HELP DISPEL FEAR THAT U.S. EXECUTIVE'S DETERMINATION TO CONCLUDE TREATY WAS WAVERING AND THAT IT GAVE BOOST TO THOSE PANAMANIAN WHO ARE SEEKING TO NUDGE TORRIJOS TOWARD AGREEMENT. PRIVATE COMMENTS BY EMBASSY CONTACTS AND PRESS HAVE GREETED IT AS A MAJOR AND TIMELY STATEMENT ADRESSED TO U.S. PUBLIC OPINION. PANAMANIAN AWARE OF STRONG OPPOSITION IN U.S. BY ELEMENTS OF SENATE AND CONGRESS TO ANY CHANGE IN PANAMA, HAVE PRAISED

PERSONAL COURAGE OF BUNKER FOR WHAT THEY TERM HIS HONEST, FRANK AND BLUNT MESSAGE TO U.S. PUBLIC. EDITORIALS HAVE SECONDED HIS WARNINGS AND WARMLY WELCOMED OPENING OF INTERNAL U.S. DEBATE OF CANAL ISSUE IN A NEW FRAME OF REFERENCE. END SUMMARY

1. EMBASSY SOURCE WITH ACCESS TO TOP GOP LEADERS TOLD EMBOFF MAY 27 THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S SEATTLE
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SPEECH WAS JUST WHAT WAS NEEDED TO REDUCE FEARS WHICH

HAD BEEN GROWING DURING PAST TWO MONTHS THAT U.S. EXECUTIVE'S DETERMINATION TO CONCLUDE A NEW CANAL TREATY HAD BEEN WAVERING. PANAMANIAN'S HAVE TOLD US THAT, GIVEN CURRENT MOOD IN THE U.S., BUNKER'S HONEST, FORCEFUL AND BLUNT WORDS ADDRESSED TO U.S. PUBLIC OPINION REQUIRED PERSONAL COURAGE AND CONSTITUTED EVIDENCE OF U.S. EXECUTIVE'S COMMITMENT TO NEGOTIATE A NEW TREATY. EMBOFF WAS TOLD SPEECH WAS HELPFUL TO THOSE PANAMANIAN'S WHO WANT A TREATY AND ARE TRYING TO NUDGE TORRIJOS TOWARD AGREEMENT.

2. GOP-CONTROLLED MATUTINO, IN ITS FEATURE EDITORIAL MAY 24, SET THE PREDOMINANT TONE OF REACTION TO THE SEATTLE SPEECH. OBSERVING THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER WAS ADDRESSING U.S. PUBLIC OPINION IN GENERAL AND CANAL TREATY OPPONENTS IN PARTICULAR, MATUTINO PRAISED SPEECH FOR ITS HONESTY, ENERGY AND CLARITY. WELCOMING FRANK RECOGNITION OF ANOMALY OF PRESENT TREATY RELATIONSHIP AND UNDERSCORING WARNING OF POSSIBLE VIOLENCE IF IT IS NOT PROMPTLY RECTIFIED, THE PAPER REPEATEDLY STRESSED THAT PANAMA DID NOT WANT AN ARMED CONFRONTATION. AFFIRMING THAT THE DANGER OF CONFLICT IS A REAL ONE THE EDITORIAL POINTEDLY STATED THAT PANAMA HAD REACHED THE "POINT OF NO RETURN". WHILE PANAMANIAN'S WISH TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., IT WARNED THAT "EVERYTHING HAS ITS LIMIT, AND IN THIS CASE THAT LIMIT HAS ARRIVED." CITING INTENSIVE EFFORTS OF U.S. TREATY OPPONENTS -- "IN CONGRESS, THE PENTAGON AND OTHER KEY POSITIONS" -- TO FRUSTRATE THE CURRENT NEGOTIATION, THE EDITORIAL EMPHASIZED THAT THEY WOULD BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR "WHAT COULD OCCUR." NOTING WITH SATISFACTION THAT SPEECH CALLED FOR MAJOR

EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN IN U.S., MATUTINO OBSERVED THAT PANAMANIAN'S WOULD "PROBABLY" PARTICIPATE IN ORDER TO PERSONALLY MAKE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AWARE OF "OUR TRUTH."

3. TAKING ITS TURN, EL PANAMA AMERICA MAY 26 UNDERLINED IMPORTANCE OF THE SPEECH'S MESSAGE REACHING A WIDE U.S. AUDIENCE. ENDORSING AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S ANALYSIS OF THE DANGER OF CONFLICT AND THE NEED FOR U.S. TO RECOGNIZE AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AVOID IT, THE PAPER WAS HEARTENED BY WHAT IT SAW AS EMERGENCE OF THE TRUTH. STRESSING THAT PANAMA WAS SEEKING REDRESS BY NEGOTIATION BUT WAS PREPARED TO ACHIEVE IT THROUGH LIBERATION, THE EDITORIAL EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF INTRANSIGENCE WOULD AT LAST BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE U.S. EL PANAMA AMERICA COLUMNIST MARIO AUGUSTO, WRITING IN MAY 25 EDITION, EXTOLLED AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S UNDERSTANDING OF PANAMA'S POSITION, HIS CONDUCT OF THE

NEGOTIATION, AND HIS OBJECTIVITY AND COURAGE IN FRANKLY TELLING IT LIKE IT IS. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEECH, FOR PANAMA, IS THAT IT PUBLICLY CONFIRMS THAT THE CHIEF NEGOTIATOR'S POSITION IS THAT OF THE UNITED STATES AND THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT IS PREPARED TO DEFEND IT IN THE SENATE. ACCORDING TO AUGUSTO, THE SPEECH CAME AT PRECISELY THE MOST OPPORTUNE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT.

4. SEMI-INDEPENDENT LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA, IN A FEATURE MAY 25 EDITORIAL, SIMILARLY LAUDED THE AMBASSADOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF PANAMANIAN REALITY AND THE ACCURACY OF HIS ANALYSIS. STRESSING COMMON STAKE IN PREVENTING OPPOSITION IN U.S. FROM OCCASIONING THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH THE AMBASSADOR SPOKE, ESTRELLA WARNED THAT PANAMA'S PATIENCE COULD COME TO AN END OF CONCLUSION OF A NEW TREATY IS SERIOUSLY DELAYED OR AN AGREEMENT IS REJECTED OR PIGEON-HOLED BY THE CONGRESS. THE GOP'S THIRD MAJOR PAPER, RITICA, ALONE VOICED A SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE REACTION TO SPEECH. ALTHOUGH IT UNDERLINED RECOGNITION AND DEFENSE OF PANAMANIAN ASPIRATIONS FOR SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE CANAL ZONE, CRITICA WAS DISTURBED BY REFERENCES TO CONTINUED U.S. INTERESTS IN THE CANAL.

5. COMMENT: THE BUNKER SPEECH WAS JUST WHAT WAS NEEDED TO DISPEL SOMEWHAT THE AIR OF PESSIMISM THAT HAD BEEN SETTLING OVER PANAMA IN RECENT WEEKS AS A RESULT OF AN ABSENCE OF VISIBLE ACTIVITY IN THE NEGOTIATIONS COUPLED WITH PESSIMISTIC AND CONFUSING STATEMENTS BY FOREIGN MINISTER TACK DURING HIS VARIOUS TRIPS TO LATIN AMERICAN CAPITALS. WHILE THE US-PANAMANIAN JOINT DECLARATION AT THE OAS MEETING IN WASHINGTON PROBABLY HALTED THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL IN CONFIDENCE, THE CANDOR OF THE BUNKER SPEECH HAS GIVEN PANAMANIAN EVIDENCE THAT THE U.S. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXECUTIVE'S DETERMINATION TO CONCLUDE A TREATY WITH

PANAMA IS NOT WAVERING AS THEY HAD BEGUN TO SUSPECT KNOWLEDGEABLE PANAMANIAN ARE AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS FACING A TREATY IN THE U.S. AND ARE HIGHLY PLEASED AT EVIDENCE THAT THE U.S. EXECUTIVE IS BEGINNING TO EDUCATE THE U.S. PUBLIC CONCERNING THE NEED FOR A TREATY. IN PARTICULAR, THE SPEECH HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS A COURAGEOUS ACT BY AMBASSADOR BUNKER WHO, AS ONE PANAMANIAN EXPRESSED IT, "HAS PUT HIS HAND IN THE FIRE." THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE MESSAGE WAS TIMELY. THE PANAMANIAN PUBLIC HAS SEEN MAY 25 - THE DATE TACK REPORTEDLY GAVE IN WASHINGTON FOR BUNKER'S NEXT NEGOTIATING VISIT - COME AND GO WITH NO NEWS OF WHEN THE NEXT TALKS WILL OCCUR. JORDEN

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